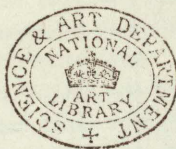


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THE
EDINBURGH SCHOOL OF DESIGN
IN 1784.

*From the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,
January 11, 1869.*



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EDINBURGH SCHOOL OF DESIGN

1884

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ON THE SUPPOSED "MISSING SCHOOL OF DESIGN IN
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH," 1784. BY DAVID
LAING, ESQ., FOR. SEC. S.A. SCOT.

IN the opening ADDRESS by the President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, on the 7th of December last, one head was "A MISSING SCHOOL OF DESIGN IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH." The allusions to this were founded on a passage in the biography of Sir George Clerk-Maxwell of Penicuik, printed in Vol. I. of their Transactions. The passage is as follows, in the "Account of Sir George Clerk-Maxwell, Baronet, read by Mr John Clerk, junior, July 5, 1784."

"Mr CLERK had an excellent taste for the fine arts, and was solicitous to encourage them. As one instance of this, he had the principal concern in establishing and procuring an endowment for the Drawing-school in the University of Edinburgh, where twenty pupils are instructed *gratis* in the art of designing. These are selected from among such young people, of either sex, as gives signs of genius, who are destined to apply to those professions in which a skill in that art is requisite. This Institution has contributed more than any other circumstance to the great improvement of ornamental manufactory which this country has made during the last twenty years. And whoever recollects the old patterns of carpet, damask, gauze, and other manufactures of that sort, and compares them with those of the present day, must allow the superior elegance of design now exhibited in

those productions, and which may reasonably be ascribed, in a great measure, to the happy effects produced by the Institution we have mentioned.”¹

The President, on this “novel and surprising” statement, as he calls it, made the following remarks :—

“It is impossible that Mr Clerk, himself an ardent admirer of art, and addressing a Society composed largely of Professors of the University, could be mistaken in making this precise statement. Nevertheless, I never heard of such a School in the University. There was most assuredly no such School in existence when I first joined it as student in 1811. It cannot have merged in the present excellent School of Design, because that School, as now constituted, was founded only in recent times; and to several of its governors this passage from Sir George Clerk-Maxwell’s biography has seemed quite as novel and surprising as to myself. What, then, has become of the University School? When did it expire? How did it vanish? Above all, what has become of the endowment? All I can say upon the last head is, that positively it has not been swallowed up by the Senatus Academicus since I became a member of the body in 1822.”²

A statement like this, coming with so much authority, might lead to the natural conclusion that not only a useful scheme had been abandoned, but that a special endowment had unaccountably been appropriated to some other purpose. I think it but right, therefore, to say that the purport of the above statement has been quite misunderstood; and to assure the learned Professor that the School and its endowment were not under the control either of the Patrons or of the Senatus, although meeting for several years within the walls of the College, but was simply the excellent

¹ Vol. i. p. 55, Edinburgh, 1788, 4to.

² Opening Address of PROFESSOR CHRISTISON, Royal Society. See *Edinburgh Courant* newspaper, 9th Dec. 1868; also Proceedings of the Royal Society, vol. vi. No. 77, p. 401.

School of Drawing maintained with so much efficiency *for upwards of a century* by the Honourable the Board of Trustees, and carried on to this day within the building in which we are at present assembled. To make this conclusion undoubted, a few words of explanation may be excused—taken from notes which I collected five or six years ago for a lecture delivered to the Royal Scottish Academy.

In October 1729, an Association was formed for the encouragement of the Arts, and Improvement of the Students in Drawing from models in plaster of the best Antique Statues, &c. It was named *The Edinburgh School of St Luke*, and the Rules, dated the 18th of that month, are still preserved, signed by about twenty painters or artists, and eight lovers of painting, as Fellows. To the honour of the Lord Provost and Town Council, as Patrons of the University, the use of an apartment within the College was granted for the School in June 1731. I cannot say how long this “Winter Academy” for drawing was kept up, as no minutes are preserved; but we know, on the authority of Sir Robert Strange, that he himself was for two years one of its pupils, in 1735–1737, when it was superintended by his master, Richard Cooper, the engraver.

Previous to this time, in conformity with the Articles of the Union, George the First, by an Act of Parliament, A.D. 1727, nominated Trustees for overseeing the Fisheries and Manufactures of Scotland, and applying for their encouragement the sums destined for that purpose. That skill in drawing, at a later period, was not overlooked, appears from the List of Premiums offered by the Trustees in the year 1757, which specify drawings of figures from the antique, landscapes, and architecture, after pictures, prints, or drawings, fruits and flowers, along with patterns of designs for carpets, &c. This List, with the names of the successful competitors, is printed in the “*Edinburgh Magazine*” for 1758, with the title as follows. It consists of 119 articles, among which are the following :—

"A List of the Premiums adjudged by the EDINBURGH SOCIETY for the Encouragement of Arts, Sciences, Manufactures and Agriculture, Anno 1757.

- "No. 54. For the best drawing after any statue, bust, or bas-relieve, by boys under twenty years of age, *four guineas*.
—To John Donaldson, Edinburgh.
55. For the second ditto, *three guineas*.—To Richard Cooper, junior, Edinburgh.
56. For the third ditto, *two guineas*.—To George Willison in Edinburgh.
57. For the best landscape, after picture, print, or drawing, by boys under eighteen years of age, *three guineas*.—To Peter Donaldson, in Edinburgh.
58. For the second ditto, *two guineas*.—Nothing of sufficient merit produced.
59. For the neatest and best drawing of architecture, after picture, print, or drawing, by boys under eighteen years of age, *three guineas*.—Nothing produced.
60. For the second ditto, *two guineas*.—Nothing produced.
61. For the best drawing of fruits or flowers with foliage, after prints, paintings, or drawings, by boys or girls under fifteen years of age, *two guineas*.—Nothing of sufficient merit produced.
62. For the second ditto, *one guinea*.—Nothing of sufficient merit produced.
63. To the boy or girl under twenty years of age, who shall produce the best pattern of his or her invention for a Scots carpet, the pattern to be drawn upon design-paper, from which the carpet can be put into the loom, *two guineas*.—Nothing produced.
64. To ditto for a damask carpet, *two guineas*.—Nothing produced.
65. To ditto for damask table-linen, *two guineas*.—Nothing produced.

No. 66. To ditto for flowered lawn, *two guineas*.—Nothing produced.”

In furtherance of this object, the Board of Trustees, in 1760, made a permanent appointment of a Drawing-master, with a handsome salary, for instructing *gratis* young persons of both sexes in those branches of drawing connected with arts and manufactures.

The first master appointed by the Board, under the new arrangement, was WILLIAM DE LA COUR. He was succeeded in 1768 by CHARLES PAVILLON, both of them, it is supposed, natives of France. On the death of Pavillon in 1772, the office was conferred on ALEXANDER RUNCIMAN, the historical painter, who had returned from Italy, and was then engaged in painting the ceilings and walls of Penicuik House for Sir James Clerk. His brother, George Clerk-Maxwell, who succeeded to the Baronetcy in 1782, had been one of the Board of Trustees since the year 1760; and no doubt took a special interest in Runciman's appointment, to which allusion is evidently made in the Memoir read to the Royal Society in 1784, the year in which Sir George died.

The following extract from a well-known work, the “History of Edinburgh,” by Hugo Arnot, published in 1779, and re-issued as a new work in 1788, is quite sufficient of itself to dispel any shadow of doubt regarding the supposed Missing School of Design in the University of Edinburgh:—

“OF THE ACADEMY FOR DRAWING.

“The Board of Trustees for the encouragement of manufactures, &c., in Scotland, in A.D. 1772, appointed Mr Alexander Runciman, painter, to teach twenty boys or girls drawing, allowing him a yearly salary of L.120. *For the accommodation of this School, the Town Council have given Mr Runciman the use of two apartments in the College.* The Board bestows L.15 yearly, to be distributed among the scholars by way of premium, for the first, second, and third best drawings. The time limited for each

pupil's continuing under Mr Runciman is four years, that being deemed sufficient for any boys or girls, of moderate capacity, acquiring a knowledge in drawing sufficient to assist them in their respective occupations; this institution being solely appropriated for the use of manufactures, not intended as an Academy of painting."¹

RUNCIMAN died in October 1785, and had for his successor, DAVID ALLAN.

[I have since been favoured by PETER MILLER, Esq., First Baillie, with an extract, as follows, from the Town Council Records, which shows that Pavillon had previously obtained the use of these two rooms in the College, in January 1769; and also gives a curious account of the arrangement made with one of the Professors in order to carry the Council's resolution into effect:—

“The College Treasurer represented, that it being proposed to accomodate Mr Pavillon with two rooms in the College in order to teach drawing and designing, it happens that one of these rooms is presently possest by the Clerks of the Court of Session for holding their papers. That in order to put them to no inconvenience Dr Mathew Stewart had consented to give a room for holding the said papers, upon conditions the Good Town would cause paper his dining-room, the expense whereof would be about L.2 sterling. Which being considered by the Magistrates and Council they unanimously agree to the said proposal for accomodating Mr Pavillon with two rooms in the College for teaching drawing and designing allenarly, and recommend to the College Treasurer to cause paper the said room for Mr Mathew Stewart, the expense not exceeding two pounds sterling.”²]

¹ Arnot's History, p. 423.

² 4th Jan. 1769, vol. 85, Council Records.